

Chief Executive’s Report, November 2023

Introduction

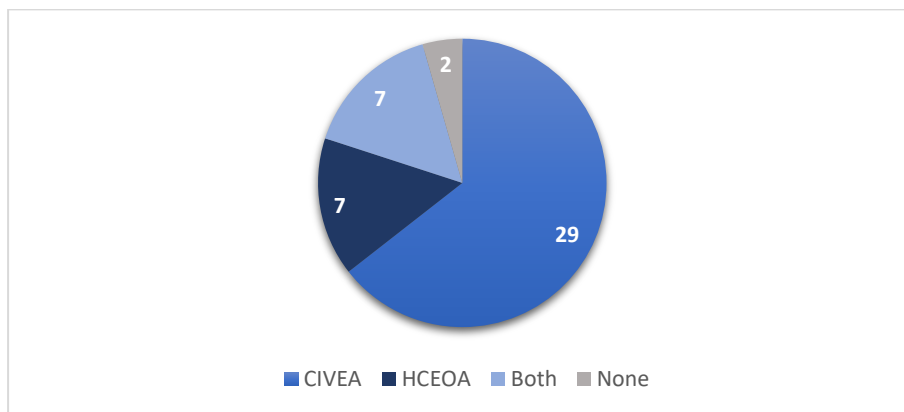
1. It has only been one month since the October Board meeting and the focus of this last month has been on launching our accredited firms register and getting ready to tender for our forthcoming research, whilst also kicking off scoping work for three new programmes of work (quarterly data returns, standards development and complaints handling). We have also maintained a strong focus on building creditor engagement and support and building understanding and partnerships through speaking at events and wider communications activity.

Current cash position

2. The cash position at the 30 October 2023 was approximately £728k. This includes the £176k loan from CIVEA, which is due to be repaid by March 2024.
3. The Board has a separate quarterly budget report on the agenda.

Accreditation

4. The initial window for applications for accreditation has now expired and we published our first online register on 25 October, as planned. The register has 45 accredited firms, from across both high court and civil enforcement:



5. We believe that this number of accredited firms represents very good coverage of the market. For example:
 - We have accredited all eligible CIVEA members
 - We have been able to confirm that all enforcement firms working for Welsh Local Authorities are accredited (we do not have information from English LAs on their providers to allow us to make a similar assessment)
 - Based on Ministry of Justice data, we estimate that accredited firms account for over 95% of civil enforcement cases

- The High Court Enforcement Officers Association estimates that accredited firms make up more than 97% of the market of high court writs (based on data returns from industry to the MoJ in 2022).
6. It is encouraging that we have also been able to accredit two firms that are not members of CIVEA or the HCEOA. We are planning some further work to scope the non-CIVEA market and better understand who else might be active in civil enforcement but not currently accredited by us. This will primarily take the form of web and social media sweeps. We will keep the Board informed of progress in this regard.
 7. The launch of the register and our associated communications had good traction.

Research and evidence

8. Since the last Board meeting, the team has met with members of our technical expert panel to seek feedback on the powers and parameters briefing and themes for exploration. This has been very productive and we are now confident that we have material that is both accurate and sufficiently clear to support the research.
9. We have also further developed the Invitation To Tender to reflect the additional input from experts and we are planning to launch the exercise around the 10 November.
10. We have started to scope our expectations for the Quarterly Data Returns from firms. We are planning to bring a paper to the December Board on this. Ultimately, we are hoping to be able to consult from December/January and introduce returns from March/April 2024.

ECB Standards Development

11. Now that the Director of Policy and oversight has started, we have begun to scope this programme of work in earnest. We plan to present an early scoping paper to the Board for its meeting in December to get initial views on the timetable and approach to undertaking this work and engaging with the sector.

Complaints handling

12. As with Standards development, we have now started to scope this project. At the moment, the focus is on extending our understanding of existing routes to redress within the enforcement sector, as well as building links and understanding of other ombudsmen and complaints handling bodies.

Creditor engagement

13. There has been further progress on engaging creditors over the last month. Highlights have included:
 - Loop (Yorkshire Water) has joined Welsh Water and Severn Trent in declaring a commitment in favour of only using ECB accredited agents, and we expect more water and energy companies to follow now that accreditation has been successfully launched.
 - The first local authority seminar to spread the message on the ECB and prepare councils for the extension of accreditation to in-house enforcement services in

2024 will be held for North East councils in Durham on 28 November. Further seminars will follow around the country.

- Qualco, a technology company delivering panel management solutions to the credit industry, has made a commitment that in order to receive accounts or to be open for future opportunities, enforcement firms and partners must be accredited by the ECB.

Communications and engagement

14. The main focus of our communications activity this month has been publicising the launch of the online register and encouraging creditors to start using it in their purchasing decisions. This has included social media posts, a special edition newsletter and articles in the trade press.
15. Other activity this month has included the first Chair's blog, which summarised the main themes that the Board discussed at its last meeting. This appeared to be received well and has generated some positive engagement. The Director of Creditors and Government also contributed an article to IRRV Insight magazine.
16. In terms of wider stakeholder engagement, the last month has included the following highlights:
 - Speaking at the Wales Parking Conference in Swansea
 - Speaking at the Civil Court Users Association conference in Birmingham

Upcoming engagement

17. Over the coming month, we will shift our focus from accreditation to our forthcoming work on the standards and evidence gathering. In relation to creditors, we will continue to focus on building active support and will now be able to point to the very wide coverage we have achieved through accreditation to help here.
18. We have the following engagements planned (across the team):
 - Visiting a number of High Court and civil Enforcement firms
 - Visiting further debt advice providers
 - Shadowing Enforcement Officers and Arrest Officers in the South East and North West of England and in Wales
 - Speaking at an Institute of Money Advisors regional forum
 - Chairing a session on fair enforcement at the Money Advice Liaison Group annual conference, in Birmingham
 - Attending the High Court Enforcement Officers Association annual Luncheon in London
 - Speaking at the Local Government Debt Recovery Event.